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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 001915

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SUBJECT: MA YING-JEOU: TOO GENTLE FOR JAMES SOONG?

Classified By: Acting Director David J. Keegan, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary: The KMT rank-and-file is scrambling to take partisan advantage of Chen Shui-bian's political and personal miseries, but their Chairman, Ma Ying-jeou, seems inclined to demure and delay. Instead of attacking Chen and calling for his ouster, Ma has preached caution and patience. Angry KMT and PFP supporters have called Ma weak and indecisive, and fear his lack of strategic vision will cost the Pan-Blues this valuable opportunity to get rid of Chen. PFP Chairman James Soong does not expect the LY to approve his recall movement against President Chen. Rather, his plan is to use the recall bill and public protests to build a "social movement" to force Chen to step down voluntarily. By leading the charge against Chen, Soong seeks to cast himself as the moral leader of the Pan-Blues, and thus to increase his chance of winning the Taipei Mayoral race in December. Ma won't lose the party over his gentle response, but he risks once again missing an opportunity to energize the troops he will need to win the presidency in 2008. End summary.

¶2. (C) President Chen has come under increasing pressure to step down amid a series of scandals involving members of his administration, his wife Wu Shu-jen, and other members of the first family. The PFP and KMT agree that Chen should step down to accept responsibility, but have split on how to capitalize on Chen's misfortune. PFP Chairman James Soong has endorsed a campaign to recall President Chen, and has promised weekly protests until Chen steps down. KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou has publicly opposed the recall because it has little chance of overcoming DPP opposition in the LY and the majority of voters do not want it. Ma has also expressed concern about Chen's would-be replacement, the unpredictable Vice President Annette Lu. He has not ruled out a recall, but has urged Pan-Blue supporters to wait until the evidence clearly implicates Chen and his wife. Instead of a recall, Ma favors a no-confidence vote against the Premier, Su Tseng-chang. If a no-confidence vote were successful, Chen

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could appoint a new premier or dissolve the LY and call for new LY elections. This strategy could benefit the KMT, which might win big against a DPP in turmoil. KMT LY President Wang Jin-pyng, however, has expressed reservations about this course, and Honorary KMT Chairman Lien Chan has publicly criticized Ma for his hesitation.

13. (C) KMT Deputy Policy Director Chang Jung-kung told AIT on June 2 that he, KMT Secretary General Chan Chun-po, Policy Director Tseng Yung-chuan, and National Policy Foundation President Tsai Hsung-hsiung had privately urged Ma to lead an aggressive partisan attack against Chen and to support the Pan-Blue recall bill. Chang told AIT that the majority of the KMT LY caucus is frustrated with Ma, and that many senior party leaders view Ma's hesitation as a sign of weakness. He added that even though the DPP is in a state of free-fall right now, Ma cannot afford to sit back and watch because Lien Chan, Wang Jin-pyng, and James Soong are all competing against him for moral leadership of the Pan-Blue movement. Chang predicted to AIT that Ma would face harsh criticism from party leaders during the June 3-4 Plenary Session of the KMT Central Committee, and added that Ma must be willing to take on Chen publicly if he is to ward off growing doubts about whether he has the necessary conviction to lead the KMT and the Pan-Blues.

14. (C) KMT Legislator Sun Ta-chien told AIT that Ma was in fact criticized by party leaders during last weekend's Plenary Session of the KMT Central Committee and that few KMT leaders were willing to defend Ma's position (aside from Policy Director Tseng Yung-chuan who, Sun said, was only taking orders from Ma). Sun argued that more Pan-Blues would have accepted Ma's "wait-and-see" approach if they believed Ma had a strategy to oust Chen and was working to implement it while waiting for the case against Chen to develop, but Ma seems to be doing nothing.

15. (C) In contrast, Sun continued, James Soong is vigorously pushing the recall bill, and strengthening his hand by organizing protests and other forms of public pressure against Chen. Sun said that while Soong is "too selfish" in using the recall bill to boost his chances at winning the Taipei mayoral race, Ma is "too gentle, too legal, and too

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clean" to seize this opportunity to get rid of Chen. Ma has not and will not lose control of the KMT or his leadership of the Pan-Blues, Sun said, but could be in danger of losing the "moral leadership" of the Blues to James Soong if he doesn't replace his "wait-and-see" approach with a coherent strategy to get rid of President Chen.

16. (C) According to PFP public relations advisor Liao Wen-chang, PFP Chairman James Soong knows the recall movement has virtually no chance of passing the LY, but is using the recall as a tool in conjunction with media and public protests to shame Chen into stepping down voluntarily. At the same time, Soong is cleverly raising his political profile in advance of the Taipei mayoral race. Liao said Soong's strategy is to remain at the forefront of the "social movement" to recall Chen, all the while using his increased visibility to attract more supporters to himself. On June 3, Soong led a mass rally demanding Chen's resignation. Ma, who had stated earlier that he would not attend, bowed to pressure from within his party and joined Soong on the stage.

While Ma won't lose the KMT over his gentle response to Chen, he risks once again missing an opportunity to energize the troops he will need to win the presidency in 2008.

YOUNG